

P R E A C H I N G
CHRIST CRUCIFIED
THE
61.
MOST USEFUL METHOD
O F
P R E A C H I N G.

ILLUSTRATED IN TWO DISCOURSES,

The SUBSTANCE of which was preached before an ASSEMBLY of Protestant Dissenting Ministers, at EXETER, on September 6th, 1786.

By WILLIAM LAMPOR_T.

Published at the Request of the ASSEMBLY.

In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain;
And plain in manner; ——————
————— much impress'd.
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds
May feel it too ——————

COWPER.

L O N D O N:

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M, DCC. LXXXVI.



S E R M O N I.

¹ Cor. i. 23 and 17.

We preach Christ crucified—not with Wisdom of Words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none Effect.

TO illustrate and enforce the utility
of preaching Christ crucified,

I. With regard to the subject itself,
and then

II. With respect to the manner of doing it, is the design of this address, which, with all due deference, is submitted to the candid consideration of this audience.

The resurrection of Christ being the proof positive that he died, not for any offences of his own, and that he was

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crucified, not altogether according to the natural course of things, but by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*; it was wisely done by the apostles to begin their publick ministry with vouching for the truth of his resurrection. But this point being established, and many convinced that he was the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead; his crucifixion was to be the source from whence their future preaching was to be derived; or the grand basis on which all their future endeavours to reform mankind were to be erected. Accordingly, the principal bent of the apostle in his publick character, as a person divinely commissioned to convert and save the world, dead in trespasses and sins, centered here—preaching Christ crucified. Nay, so strongly was his mind impressed with its importance, that in the beginning of the next chapter he thus observes, I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. His eminent abilities, his acquirements, &c.

quired knowledge, his inspired powers were to be devoted to one purpose, and directed to one point—preaching Christ crucified. All his time and talents were to be employed in illustrating and enforcing the origin and cause, the design, the tendency and constraining influence of this doctrine—in its connection with the state of mankind at the beginning of their existence, as the descendants of Adam in whom all die, but from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ should proceed to bruise the serpent's head, and remedy all the evils of Adam's disobedience:—in its connection with the different dispensations of God to mankind before the flood—and after it, under Abraham, and then under Moses and the prophets on the one hand, and under the heathen moralists and philosophers on the other;—in its connection with the peculiar state of mankind at the time of our Lord's appearance upon the earth, when the Gentiles, with all their wisdom, knew not God: after this, with the various revolutions in mens religious opinions, which were to take place from

time to time, even in the Christian world, and the effect which those revolutions would have on the pagan world ; till in ages to come Pagans should become Christians, and the doctrine of Christ crucified be thoroughly understood, when the knowledge of the Lord should cover the earth as the waters do the channels of the sea :—in its connection with the nature of man, considered in himself as a sinner, to be taught the evil of his ways, and animated to repentance ; then, as an adopted child of God, to be gradually improved, disciplined, and trained up for another state of existence, far more exalted than the present ; at the same time to be supported under all his troubles, to be raised above this world, and enabled to overcome it, while suffering in conformity with Christ, by his example, whose crucifixion, in this view of it, was a perfect pattern for his disciples to imitate with faithfulness unto death :—in its connection with death and its influence over it, whose sting is taken away ; and with the grave, which is now made the passage into an immortality of life and the celestial regions,

regions, where is reserved an eternal inheritance of which the child of God is made heir, joint heir with Christ, to be glorified together with him:—therefore, in its connection with the whole of Christ's character as Mediator between God and man; the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, who in the proper season came to take away the sins of it, and was manifested to destroy the works of the devil; who was delivered up for our offences, and was raised for our justification; who sitteth at the right hand of God as a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance, and then the remission of sins; who also liveth to make intercession for us; who reigneth sole Head and King over all things concerning religion and conscience for the good of his church, to govern us by his word and spirit, to perfect strength in our weakness, and to subdue all his and our enemies under his feet; and thus bring forward that happy period when the once crucified Saviour shall come again in the glory of his Father, with all his holy angels, to judge the world he died to save,
and

and to render unto every man according to his works, by determining in righteousness the characters and doom of those who did, and those who did not, refuse to have the Lord to reign over them. And then, having carried time and all its concerns into eternity, to be swallowed up in it, to give up the kingdom unto God, even the Father, that God may be all in all.

The doctrine of Christ crucified, considered thus at large, the apostle observes, in continuing his argument, is the only foundation which any man can lay * for erecting a temple of true holiness in the soul of man for the service of God. And this doctrine, saith he, *WE* the apostles preach, in contra-distinction from the other two methods of instructing and reforming mankind which had been long adopted for obtaining, if it had been possible, the salvation of the soul from its sins. Of those two methods the one consisted in the exhortations, promises and threatenings of the prophets under the dispensation of Moses ; and the other, in re-

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* Chap. iii. ii.

commending good morals from such motives as had been discovered by the best powers of the human mind, which had been continually employed and exerted to the utmost by the gentile philosophers from age to age, who set themselves apart for the purpose of taming the unruly passions of man, by displaying to the judgment blinded by appetite, the beauty of virtue, and the baseness of vice. With regard to the Jewish system, its sanctions were temporal, respecting chiefly the present state; for it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins: and the apostle saw Jew and Gentile alike guilty before God: while the latter knew not what dispensation he was under. His instructors could indeed discern a strong tendency in human nature unto that which was evil; and they bent all their forces to correct that tendency. But, alas! they knew not the cause of it: they could not look far enough back into the original constitution of things, as formed by the great Governor of nature, to specify any indisputable method of obtaining the pardon of sin, and encouraging

ing contrition: and if repentance took place; they could not point out to frail man any certain method of overcoming temptations which were as numerous almost as the objects which surrounded him, and as regularly returning as the revolving hours: neither could they extend their views far enough forward beyond this present scene of things, to ascertain a reward hereafter, sufficient to overbalance that weight of woe which the integrity of a man's virtue may sometimes bring upon him, when desirous of continuing its steady disciple, amidst the opposition constantly made against it by the various powers of the present world.

They could not afford even to the best of men any solid, positive hope, as to the future consequences of their variegated conduct; conscious to themselves, as they were, of a multitude of infirmities and sins which they found could not be shaken off, until the body sunk into the grave: neither could they say, whether those infirmities would, or would not, follow the man into another state of existence, should there be any other: and even

even on this last circumstance they could not say any thing with certainty. To preach Christ crucified to them was therefore absolutely necessary ; although in the pride of their heightened wisdom, they at first stiled it the foolishness of preaching. It was equally necessary for the Jews, the principles of whose laws were only introductory to a better system, and designed to pave the way for the doctrine of the cross. The law, saith our apostle, *was a schoolmaster*, teaching the first elements of religion in the knowledge of the unity of God, and the outlines of his moral government, *to lead men unto Christ*, a more able, a compleat tutor ; teaching them how fully to regain the favour of God when they offend him, and the future rewards of holiness in life eternal, with the final punishment of sinners by their everlasting destruction from the presence of God. Without this knowledge every serious person must feel a dreadful void in his soul : when gained, he feels its suitableness to all his wants. He is convinced that it is his great concern to embrace it, not coldly, but with all acceptation ;

ception ; and to be influenced by it, because it is in every respect adapted to the nature and condition of man, considered as a creature accountable to God his lawgiver, benefactor and judge.

On this ground, namely the relation in which mankind stand towards God, I shall rest my argument to prove the importance of preaching Christ crucified ; as the only effectual means of purifying the soul from sinful inclinations and practices, and producing the best fruits of holiness unto glory, honour and immortality.

As an intelligent creature let a man give himself a moment's serious reflection, and he will find a moment's reflection sufficient to inform him concerning his present condition. His conscience will not fail to declare most expressly and pointedly, that he has done those things which he ought not to have done ;—that it is ungrateful so to do,—and that he deserves punishment. This is the case with every man : it is human nature : for whatever judgment men may form of themselves and others mutually, in the common

common transactions of human life between man and man; the judgment which they all must pass upon themselves invariably, is that they are sinners against God. This is the leading trait in the human character: it is as striking a feature in the soul as is that intelligence which distinguishes him from the brute creation.

To quiet conscience, to obtain the pardon of sin, to get rid of its burden, has been the universal attempt of the thoughtful in every age: hence the use of sacrifices every where; and hence the moral precepts recommended to men of every nation under heaven. It was the desideratum in the science of human life.

However, it must certainly be the sole prerogative of the prince and legislator to appoint, in what manner he pleases, the method of obtaining forgiveness, and a deliverance from sin: and this is a blessing so very desirable that, without it, human life, in any the most eligible station, must be a life of doubts, and fears, and misgiving apprehensions; a life, through fear of

death, ever subject to bondage. The doctrine of Christ crucified presents us with this blessing. For what is the first position in the christian scheme of redemption but this ; *God, the supreme Lord and Lawgiver, in his unbounded love to the human race, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless us in turning away every one of us from his iniquities?* And in what light was Jesus held up to view on his first publick appearance in the world as its Saviour, but this, *Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world?* This was the noble work he undertook to execute—by representing the supremely great and only Potentate, under the endearing character of our FATHER : and setting all his perfections as revealed by Moses and the prophets in the most amiable point of view, —by the penetrating power of his precepts, which pierce into the very soul, as well as speak to the outward deportment —by his piety so eminent, his purity so spotless, his benevolence so extensive, his obedience so persevering, and his submission so resigned—by his miracles which proved,

proved, what he himself had foretold, that he had power to lay down his life, and power to take it up again ; and therefore that his crucifixion was voluntary :— all these circumstances, considered in conjunction with the will of his Father and our Father, that he should lay down his life for his sheep, conspire to give that tranquillity and satisfaction to the soul, which the most humble and fearful penitent can possibly desire. Oh how do I admire that conduct of my blessed Lord which countenanced curiosity, even while whetting up the edge of it to the sharpest point ; when he went into a synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read ; and took this passage for the subject of his discourse ; *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ; because the Lord hath appointed me to preach good tidings to the meek : he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them who are bound ; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of recompence of our God ; to comfort all that mourn ; to appoint unto them who mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for*

for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness—. No wonder that the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him—and that they all bare witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

Surely the illustration of such subjects as these, must be the proper business of the Sabbath-day, and the noble employment of the pulpit.

At our Lord's resurrection the anxiousness of their curiosity concerning the way of salvation was lulled to rest. The principle itself still continued; and was encouraged: because the inquisitive mind, hungering and thirsting after righteousness and growth in grace, would find proper food, by its continual researches into the store of the gospel treasure, to strengthen its future enquiries, having fully gratified its former ones: and because the mind would meet with an inexhaustible supply of the most pleasant streams, to fill the soul with hope and joy. If instances were necessary for the proof of this, I would request you to collect

collect what encouragement sinners receive from the doctrine of Christ crucified, to consider their ways, to humble themselves before their heavenly Father, and to repent. Its language is all invitation, to godly sorrow ; nothing to affright and bear down the contrite soul ; but every thing to encourage and invigorate it. What clear conviction does it afford, that its repentance will not be merely available, but highly acceptable to the Father of mercies ; and that it is his delight ! What a certainty may be laid before penitent persons, that if they go to the throne of grace mourning, they shall return rejoicing ! Nay, because the *free gift* of the crucified Saviour *is of many offences*, that under the distresses of conscience, lamenting its being frequently borne down by the clamorous incentives of the passions, and the deceiving baits of the world, they can have free access at all times unto the Father, and can come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every future time of need. It is therefore a doctrine most suitable to the present condition of man ; enticed as

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he is by lusts within, to submit unto temptations from without. For what is it which gives vigour to temptations but the weak state of the soul, and the power of the passions? and what is it can controul sensual or worldly inclinations on the one hand, and hereby strengthen the holy desires of the soul on the other, and thus form around it an habitual defence from the darts of temptation, but the encouragement we have to present our constant addresses to the throne of grace, from the pleasing reflection that we have a great high Priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God—who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin? By the exercise of prayer, from the encouragement hereby given, the heart is not only set upon its guard against the surprize of temptation; but learns, as by an holy instinct, where to seek assistance in the first moment of any fresh attack.

Leading off our hearers from worldly concerns by instructing them to look
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unto * Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, they learn to see the world in its true light: its charms become less attractive and alluring; its cares less corroding; its invitations and promises decrease in their power to deceive and disappoint; its frowns cease to dismay. They learn the science of heavenly mindedness. By teaching them to follow Jesus with the eye of their minds through the various scenes of his life of obedience and suffering, till he was lifted up on the cross—cried out, “it is finished”—entered the dominions of the king of terrors—despoiled him of all his trophies—and made an open passage through his gloomy regions into the bright and all-glorious regions of cœlestial bliss; they behold him as He who was dead, but is alive again; who liveth for ever more, and hath the keys of the unseen world and of death. They therefore feel the security of their hope, that because he liveth, they shall live also, and shall be kept by the power of God through faith

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* Heb. x. 2. Αφορευτεις εις

unto salvation. How animating is this hope! how does it engage them to purify themselves from all filthiness of the flesh—and of the spirit! to mortify the deeds of the body! to calm down the turbulent passions of the soul! Direct their view to Jesus wearing the crown of thorns, and led as a lamb to the slaughter, bearing their griefs and carrying their sorrows—lead them to Mount Calvary—and to the foot of the cross: there let them look and meditate: call on them likewise to listen to the dying language of this perfect pattern of meekness and love concerning his murderers, *Father forgive them for they know not what they do:* then will they find their angry passions restrained, envy and calumny silenced, anger lulled asleep, and revenge deadened; They will learn to put away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, with all malice; and to be kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, in Christ, has forgiven them.

The consideration of the doctrine of Christ crucified has, above all things, the most

most powerful tendency, not only to remove every weight or impediment to holiness; but is the most animating excitement to the cheerful obedience of every precept, and to the cultivation of the same mind as was in Christ. It engages them likewise to persevering obedience, by recalling to their recollection how much is contained in those words of their risen Lord, *Lo I am with you always unto the end of the world: and again—I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.*

How pleasing also is it for them to hear, that while this plan of salvation has its foundation laid deep and firm in lowliness of mind, it teaches them to reverence themselves, inspites them with the most laudable ambition to grow in grace, to build on this basis one grace and virtue after another, till the living temple in the soul is not only compleated, and the top-stone laid in LOVE, but each of the various parts of it is ornamented by this most amiable, essential, and distinguishing principle of true religion, which

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gives the glow of beauty and perfection to the whole.

Need I say that the doctrine of the Cross regards the welfare and tranquillity of the souls of our hearers in every *stage* of the christian life ; comforting the feeble minded, and strengthening the weak, at the same time edifying the saints in their most holy faith ? or that it gives the best direction according to every man's natural temper, and to each person's character of whatever description it may be ? Need I hint that the voluntary humiliation of Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, gives the most salutary counsel to the rich ; delivering them out of the dangerous snares of prosperity : and that it affords most ample provision for the poor ; because unto them especially the gospel is preached, assuring them of the peculiar notice of their heavenly Father, who not having spared his own Son, will with him freely give them all things.

With regard therefore to the external as well as internal concerns of mankind, old things are done away ; behold, all things

things are become new. All the dispensations of God, as the God of providence, are regulated by him under the character of the God of grace. The world, when seen through the medium of the gospel, is seen altogether in a new light: all things work together for good: all the common blessings of this life may be relished with a double sweetness, under the hope that they shall be crowned with the superior enjoyments of the other; while the crucifixion of Christ, which threw a light all around the dark mansions of the grave, illuminates every scene of life, however gloomy in itself, with the clearing rays of faith, and hope, and peace, and joy. What power, what wisdom, what love and grace are displayed in the plan of our redemption from sin and sorrow! In how endearing a light do all the divine perfections and dispensations appear!

But what shall I more say? This glorious subject branches itself into so many parts, that they are as numerous as the stars of heaven: and the repeated view of them will never tire the attention of our people, any more than the view

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of those glittering globes of light: nevertheless, it is when the world is shut out, that we view both the one and the other with the most pleasing contemplation, and cry out with increasing admiration and rapture, Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man that thou visitest him? In fact, this subject, like the sun shining throughout all creation, cherishes and invigorates all the powers of the soul, while it enlightens the mind with the most important knowledge; knowledge which looks as steadily and pointedly to *practice* as the well touched needle in the mariner's compass does to the north pole: for holiness is the grand object which I wish to keep in view in thus respectfully addressing you on this subject.

Compared with preaching Christ crucified, as above suggested, in what light does the minute and deep laboured discussion of any one of those subjects of dispute which have divided the christian world appear? "They hide their diminished heads." For of whatever importance to our hearers any of us may suppose the *belief* of them to be;

be ; yet, permit me to ask, what effect has the discussion of them in the pulpit on the minds, or (which is of more moment) on the hearts of our hearers ? If their minds are in doubt or confusion concerning the truth of them, their hearts must remain unimproved : if they receive them rapidly, and without considering the weight or futility of the arguments advanced in support of them ; their hearts are generally filled with spiritual pride, bigotry and animosity ; and hereby, whatever they may think, are rendered worse than unimproved. Preaching Christ crucified is free from any of those ill effects, and in reality we hereby preach the whole system of the gospel, as consisting in *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ* * : and by preaching repentance and faith we shall, in imitation of our apostle's method of publick instruction, and according to his declaration to the elders of the church at Ephesus, keep back nothing that is *profitable* † ; but declare the whole counsel or DETERMINATION.

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* *Acts xx. 21.* † *Ibid. ver. 29.*

NATION of GOD concerning their holiness and happiness *.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED therefore contains the whole subject of our commission.

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firmest foundation, & widest room to diffuse

* Ibid. ver. 27. παρά την Σούλην. This word, in its primary sense, signifies advice ; and when applied to a superior, it means his *will* or *determination* concerning something he would have performed. Thus, Hom. II. i. ver. 5. Διὸς δέτελετο βελή : the decree of Jupiter was accomplished. It signifies advice given for the *regulation of conduct*. Thus, Hom. II. ii. ver. 143. ὁσοι ὡν βελῆς ἵπαξσον : as many as submitted not unto his advice : and it does not in the least refer to the investigation or communication of truth simply considered in itself. The various passages where the word is used in the New Testament prove this. e. g. ‘The kings of the earth stood, and the rulers were gathered together to do—what thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.’ Acts iv. 28. ‘Who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will,’ Ephes. i. 11. ‘Him (Christ) delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,’ Acts ii. 23. The epithet or adjective here used, points out most precisely the meaning of the substantive.

I am happy in this opportunity of vindicating our apostle from any design of giving, by the above declaration, the least encouragement to any of his successors to imagine, that they shall be guilty of the blood of their hearers, unless they are discussing in the pulpit, every thing which they conceive to be contained

Wide and extended as it is, here it is bounded: and by it are we to regulate all our discourses and instructions.

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contained in the scriptures. It is not the meaning of the word. Saint Paul's idea was very different. For if we judge of the state of his mind from his situation and circumstances at the time when he made the above declaration to the elders of the church, we shall then enter into his feelings, and the spirit of the text. For preaching the doctrine of the cross the Jews hated him: they laid in wait to assassinate him *. Still, however, he was determined to persist in his course; though at the peril of his life. He taught this doctrine publickly, in the most open manner; and from house to house, wherever he went; although he knew that the Jews had their spies dispersed in different quarters, to lay hold on him, testifying, both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. And thus, *notwithstanding the danger to which he was exposed, he did not flinch to declare the whole counsel of God!* he would not keep back any thing that was *profitable*; both to Jew and Greek in common. But does not this circumstance evidently imply, that he made known only so much of what had been revealed to him, as he knew would be profitable; but *no more?* This was really his conduct towards the Corinthians whom he fed with milk, but not with strong meat; because they were not able to bear it: they

* Ibid. ver. 19.

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and which have no manifest and decided
connection with it, we are not authorised
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they could not digest it : instead of being serviceable to them, he found it would prove a source of greater animosity than was already among them. He was therefore preaching the whole counsel of God when he was declaring whatever would prove beneficial to their souls ; the improvement of the soul in holiness constituting the whole determination of God concerning his intelligent offspring.

Preaching Christ crucified was declaring all this.

Notwithstanding ‘ the curiosity of the human mind may naturally have prompted the Ephesians to make the most thorough enquiry about the religion proposed to them by the apostle, and notwithstanding his known readiness and fortitude to avow and defend the truth on all occasions * ;’ yet by his keeping back nothing that was profitable, and by feeding with milk and not with strong meat, he did not choose to give full scope to that curiosity which inclines the mind to speculate on subjects which at present we can discern only through a glafs darkly. The reasons why he did not indulge that curiosity will be mentioned hereafter. Permit me to ask in this place, whether there has not been too much curiosity among christians in every age, either like the papist, with the

* See a sermon preached at Exeter last May, by Mr. Bietland : printed by Mr. Trewman, and sold by him and the author.

to preach. This appears from the apostle's mode of expression in the text, we PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED : we are *heralds* appointed to proclaim this truth so credible in itself, and worthy of all acceptance ; namely that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

The office of an herald is to announce the will of his prince concerning the safety and welfare of his subjects: and this annunciation is to be done with all *plainness*

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the Jew, to require a sign, or, like the philosophic protestant, with the Greek, to seek after wisdom? Preaching Christ crucified would do both of them more service.

The interpretation given of the above phrase (counsel of God) will not, I am perswaded, be cordially relished either by itinerant ignorance, or stationed quacks in divinity; because it may tend to deprive their sermons of all their supposed excellence: yet I am equally perswaded, that it will be perused with all candour by my much respected friend, the author of the sermon alluded to; the reasoning of which, when considered as a general principle looking pointedly to the improvement of the heart by enlightening the mind, deserves high encomiums: and I most chearfully embrace this opportunity of throwing in my mite of applause to the honesty and liberality of the motives which appear to have actuated him at the time of his composing it,

and perspicuity; that the subjects may not expose themselves to danger, from ignorance or uncertainty with regard to the salutary system or code of government they are under. The christian herald therefore most sadly mistakes the nature of his office, the design of the pulpit, and the business of the Sabbath-day; when he attempts to carry his hearers into the aerial regions of systematic divinity: for what is generally the effect of the knowledge which he communicates? The apostle observes, that knowledge puffeth up: and if this be wisdom, is it not the wisdom of words, men's wisdom, or the wisdom of this world? Expressions these, used by our apostle to caution his successors concerning the *manner* in which they are to preach Christ crucified. To illustrate this is the design of the second part of our subject.

S E R M O N II.

1 COR. i. 23 and 17.

We preach Christ crucified—not with Wisdom of Words, lest the Cross of Christ be made of none Effect.

LE S T the Cross of Christ be made of none effect! Unhappily for us then, it appears that this best of plans for reforming mankind may fail of its effect, if improperly pursued. Under this affecting idea, which most strongly impressed the apostle's mind, earnestly bent on the salvation of the souls of men, he observes, I came not with excellence of speech or of wisdom; and again, my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words

words of men's wisdom ; but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power ; that your faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

The little effect which our preaching has upon mankind, demands our most serious consideration. Great complaint is very justly made concerning the indifference of christians to religious truth. There is, however, much greater reason to complain, of their indifference to vital practical religion ; which certainly is the grand cause of their indifference to the genuine doctrines of christianity. But whence this indifference to religion itself ? It arises, so far as preaching is concerned, from attempting to convert sinners from the errors of their ways, by preaching the gospel with wisdom of words, or man's wisdom—when, for instance, the preacher is drawing off the attention of the people from the one thing needful, by a pompous display of his oratorical powers and talents at composition ; hereby disfiguring or concealing the attractive form of true religion, by a glittering glare of words and an artificial dress. Of such sermons

sermons as these the best that can be said is, that they are amusing : and the ambassador for Christ, whose office it is to intreat men in Christ's stead, as though God did beseech them, to be reconciled unto God *, has scarce any other appellation than that of a *pretty preacher*. But the soul hungering after righteousness soon finds that he was fed with froth instead of solid food ; and that he was sent away in a manner empty. Such a preacher may be applauded for a while by the young, unexperienced as they are at present in the deceitfulness of sin, the false appearances which an alluring world wears, and the treachery of the human heart. But when the conscience by being wounded becomes painful, and especially when the anguish of the wound is increased by being *repeatedly galled and fretted*, then they also find that he is *a physician of no value, and a miserable comforter of a distressed soul.* His wisdom of words proves of little or no avail. Surely the present age has had sufficient experience of what florid declamations even on divine

* 2 Cor. v. 20.

divine subjects can, rather what they cannot do. Paul of Tarsus, ranked among the first orators by a most competent judge of true eloquence *, did not thus harangue his hearers : he did not indulge them by imitating the practice of the Græcian orators of those times, who in their publick disputationes on subjects of religious enquiry, not being able to come at the knowledge of things, endeavoured, but in vain, to supply the defect by a nice arrangement of words. It was a great misfortune to them : and over them our apostle had amazingly the advantage. He had the matter, the substance to communicate to them : and there was no occasion for him to be so curious, as they were obliged to be, about the manner. It was sterling gold which he had to present to the people : and there was no necessity for his giving it that exquisitely fine polish which the pagan orators found so essential to the adorning of their tinsel toys. It was sufficient for him to hold up, in a plain artless manner, the word of life to the people, labouring under doubts

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* Longinus.

concerning the future consequences of their past conduct, and under temptations to renew it : then he knew that its own intrinsick worth would *demonstrate* itself to their hearts as well as their understandings ; and be a convincing proof that it came down from heaven ; that it was what they had always been wanting, and what was perfectly satisfying. It was *the demonstration of the spirit and of power* ; the Spirit of God bearing witness in full union and harmony with their spirits, that the doctrine of the cross was the pearl of great price. So far was the apostle from needing a brilliancy or a redundancy of words to set off his ideas, that it was the magnitude and sublimity of his subject which forced along his words, and gave them their energy whenever the powers of language were found capable, as frequently was not the case*, of doing justice to his sentiments.

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* See particularly Rom. vii. 13. That sin, by the commandment, might become *exceeding sinful* : Ephes. iii. 18, 19. That ye may be *able* to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth and

It may be observed farther, that our apostle, although educated under Gamaliel, and intended for a public pleader at the bar, avoided in his mode of preaching Christ crucified, all that human wisdom so common among the Græcian philosophers and orators of those times. No scholastic subtleties, no metaphysical refinements are to be found with him. His mode of demonstration was not that which was deduced from a long chain of abstruse arguments, drawn out from first principles; nor did he attempt to prove the truth of his positions from the reason and fitness of things “considered abstractedly in their own nature, or in their mutual relation, habitudes and respects to each other *.”—This method of preaching

and height; and to know the love of Christ which *passeth knowledge*; that ye may be filled with all the fullness of God. Rom. viii. 18. I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be *revealed in us*. The terms in the original, here marked in italics, are altogether uncommon; and for strength are exceeding strong. See many other similar passages.

* Brekell's Serm, p. 69.

ing was too cold and unaninating ; utterly unworthy that plan which extricates the human race from the depths of wretchedness, and exalts them to the heights of happiness : a plan formed by the God of all compassion and grace before the foundation of the world, and which will be celebrated as long as eternity shall continue. The apostle could fix the attention, and pierce and warm the hearts of his hearers by his superior method of demonstration : he could convince them of the beauty of holiness by the example of their suffering Lord, who having displayed, in the most glowing colours, the excellenc of it by his life ; shed his blood in its defence : and then arose again, proving its acceptableness with the Father, and that according to his own gracious appointment, it should certainly be rewarded by him with an eternal weight of glory in another state, as well as engage his peculiar care and regard for his obedient children, while in this world.

As a public speaker our apostle laboured under two considerable disadvantages : his person was against him ; *his bodily presence*

fence was weak, and his elocution was, in the estimation of the polite Greeks, contemptible. But though he was rude in speech he was not so in knowledge*. What then under the spirit of God, but the importance of his subject—his thorough acquaintance with it—his entering into its spirit (joined with his knowledge of the human heart)—and consequently the forcible manner of his treating it, could have such an effect, that the orator, tho' brought a prisoner before the Roman governor, to defend himself against the opprobrious charge of being a mover of sedition, could make his judge tremble? Yet it was a common subject: it had been often treated of at large by the moralists of antiquity: it was on *righteousness and temperance* that he discoursed; but he gave a new turn and unexpected energy to it, by the doctrine of *a judgment to come*; of which God had given full assurance, in that he had raised the crucified Jesus from the dead. Contrast the divine wisdom which inspired Paul's discourses, with the wisdom of words and the human wisdom already

* 2 Cor. x. 10 and xi. 6.

already adverted to, and no one will be at a loss for one reason in particular among others, of his being able to plant churches wherever he went; nor on the other hand, for the cause of the present complaint among us, that the number of our hearers is decreasing, and the house of God forsaken.

There is another species of human wisdom which Paul avoided in his manner of preaching Christ crucified; namely *speculating on plain truths, and laying more stress on doctrines to be believed than on duties to be practised.* The apostle perceived an unhappy proneness to this evil both in the converted Greek and Jew. He saw the former still fond of applying to Christianity his usual practice of refining on every subject of critical investigation; and that the disciple of Moses could not throw aside his visionary idea, that those of his nation only were the elect people of God; and that the Gentile was not to expect salvation unless he fell in with the rites and ceremonies of Moses, and with that system of faith which the Jew had received from his ancestors, and embraced as the

the first and most essential principles of a religious education. When religious subjects came before them, what is my faith? and what is yours? were substituted in the room of those topics which tend most directly to correct the errors of the heart and to make a man humble. In all subjects of disputation, and especially in religious disputes, pride will ever intrude itself into company, without refusal or interruption from either party; and cause each to mispend that part of their precious time, especially on the Lord's day, which ought to have been set apart for the purposes of devotion, and employed in meditating on those subjects which lead men into a knowledge of their hearts, the present state of their souls, and the progress, or declension of the principles of the divine life and christian temper, compared with the just demands of the constraining love of Christ: such subjects as humble them in their own eyes on account of their past deserts, and animate them, from a principle of the warmest gratitude, to love and to good works.

From

From this unhappy proneness in some of our hearers to content themselves with the supposed soundness of their faith, and from the same proneness in others to satisfy and pride themselves because their religious creed, on account of the few articles it contains, is free from error and superstition, have arisen the dissensions that have prevailed among christians in every age. Hence the preference given to one minister, is not unfrequently at the expence, and to the disparagement of another. “ I am for Paul,” says one ; “ I am for Apollos,” says another ; “ I am for Cephas,” is the voice of a third ; “ and I am for Christ,” is the self-applauding declaration of a fourth. This last, and in the person’s mind, the best and most secure distinction, the apostle begins with reprobating, by asking this checking question, “ Was Christ divided ?” and again, “ was Paul crucified for you ?”—“ who is Paul ?” He was as much displeased with those who followed him in preference to other preachers, as with the rest, because the principle on which his partizans proceeded was a wrong one. To mortify them he very pertinently

pertinently puts another question; ‘ while one saith, ‘ I am of Paul;’ and another, ‘ I of Apollos;’ ‘ are ye not carnal, and walk as men?’ Zealous to see them cultivating a lowly and penitent disposition, to find among them an increasing acquaintance with their own hearts, and with the real worth of the gospel as a sanctifying principle; to observe them improving in holiness, this best knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; to behold them with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, till they all *arrive at manhood*, and come to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; and be henceforth no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive *. This was all the apostle’s aim, this his most earnest desire.

Zealous

* Ephes. iv. 2, 3—13, 14.

Zealous as he was, that all possible knowledge, and the best gifts should be coveted, and that the well informed powers of the mind should be employed in enforcing the truth ; yet all those powers were to be exerted in subservience to something more excellent than any thing else ; namely, the edifying one another in *love* ; i. e. not barely a cold acquiescence in either party, that the other should differ in sentiments ; but that ardour of affection one towards another, which proceeds from a growth of grace in ourselvēs, and discovers its joy ; that because we ourselves have been redeemed from sin, others have been redeemed likewise ; and that we are all, notwithstanding our different ideas of things which at present must necessarily be unavoidable, travelling the same road in an hatred of sin and love of holiness, towards that world where we shall know, completely, the height and depth, and length and breadth of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fulness of God.

If that proneness which there is in human nature to pay the principal attention unto doctrines to be believed, be a great imperfection in the people ; may I not ask, whether it be not criminal in the preacher to encourage it, especially in his sermons ; although on this account he may become very popular, and the multitude crowd round his pulpit ? The popularity of the preacher is no certain test of the usefulness of his preaching ; the people being frequently far from preferring that which is most wholesome to that which is most palatable to the mental appetite. To bring their understandings to submit to what cannot be understood, and to believe readily and strongly, as of essential importance, what they have not a single clear idea of, is no very difficult matter : but to gain over the submission of their hearts and wills to the intelligible and purifying injunctions of the crucified Saviour, is a task much harder indeed. But strange and deplorable as it is ! under the idea of supporting what each called the truth, the apostle perceived in some of his colleagues in the ministry, an eagerness

ness to erect on the foundation of Christ crucified, systems of their own, composed of different materials: it may be gold, silver, precious stones; or it may be wood, hay, stubble, i. e. hay and straw mixed with earth. He saw such a disposition, and most certainly wished to check it: and therefore gave this serious caution; Let every man take heed how he build thereupon:—for the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward: if any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire *. Why will not the ministers of the gospel attend more to this alarming circumstance? Why not constantly bear in mind the directions of Paul to Timothy and Titus, for the regulation of their publick instructions to the people? directions most salutary at all times and in all circumstances. To the former he gives the following advice; of those things put them in remembrance, namely, that Jesus Christ

of the seed of David was raised up from the dead ; that this is a credible saying ; for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him ; if we suffer, we shall reign with him ; if we deny him, he will also deny us. Of these things put them in remembrance ; charging them before the Lord, in the most solemn manner, that they strive not about words to no profit ; but to the subversion of the hearers. Do not we greatly stand in need of the same advice at present ? For in what do many of our differences concerning the principal doctrines in dispute among us consist, but in a distinction of words ? Are they not metaphysical distinctions, which our hearers do not understand, and expressed in terms which scripture knows nothing of ; and which therefore tend to no profit ? What has been the consequence of those long continued speculations on the doctrines of christianity which have disturbed the church in every age ? what unhappy passions have they excited ! what altercation, what mischief have they occasioned ! What has been the event of every attempt to explain
those

those doctrines ? In what state does the controversy remain now ? in what state is it likely to remain ? rather, in what state are the souls of our hearers ? Is the pride of their opinions curbed, and the vanity of their high thoughts and imaginations brought into subjection to the obedience of the precepts, and a resemblance of the same mind and temper as was in Christ ? It distresses one greatly to observe numbers of our modern preachers acting as if they really thought that a system of divinity, previously formed in their minds, lying as the foundation of every sermon, introduced on almost every occasion, and sometimes expressed in such a manner as must shock the ear of every thinking and serious person *, could have any

* I allude to such declarations as the following : That God *could not* pardon sin unless an infinite satisfaction had been made to him. That the eternal God, the Creator of the world, died on the cross — the infinite evil of sin, &c. &c. Nay, they have so accustomed their hearers to a particular set of terms and phrases, handed down as it were by tradition, that the ideas they were originally intended to convey are often overlooked

any other effect on the generality of the people, than that of confounding or subverting their minds. Why do they, and especially why do the younger part of them launch out into the unfathomable and boundless ocean of mystery ; and that too with a great press of sail, and sometimes with but a little ballast ? particularly when it is considered that an attempt to explain a mystery must be an absurdity of the first magnitude ; and that in proportion to their present modesty, their views of things may hereafter be altered, if not with regard to the articles of their faith, yet with regard to the importance of discussing them ; because

overlooked by the people, whom I have not unfrequently found to be as ignorant of their real import, as by long custom they were become fluent in the use of them. And what is worse than this, when they go to hear another preacher who shall endeavour to cloath his sentiments in such language, as he thinks to be more properly adapted to convey as forcibly as language can convey the sublime meaning of the inspired writings, such a preacher shall be prejudged by them to his disadvantage, even before he is able to make known the drift of his discourse.

cause the gaining of all knowledge and understanding all mysteries is in itself nothing. Why do we not all of us confine our discourses to such subjects as are plain, intelligible, and have the most pointed tendency to the sanctifying of the heart ? which must be the case when we are preaching Christ crucified ; but cannot be the case, whatever may be imagined, when we run into doctrines of doubtful disputation, with respect to which wise and good men of different persuasions have met with difficulties, and been put to a stand. When we have clear conceptions that an infinite Being—that God infinitely powerful—infinitely wise—infinitely gracious, has himself appointed the method of saving sinners from their sins, by sending his Son into the world for this purpose ; what ought we, or our hearers to desire more to know at present ? I appeal likewise to facts and experience, whether they would not be more improved by a plain account of the exceeding sinfulness of sin ; evinced in the horrors of mind, or what is much more to be dreaded, the stupidity of mind which it occasions,

occasions, and in the devastation which it makes on the living temple of the soul of man, than any attempt whatsoever to prove by barren demonstration the infinite evil of sin? And since the ill effects of Adam's sin, whatever they might have been, are either removed or removable by Christ crucified, I would especially ask, whether the preacher is not more in the way of his duty, when urging on his hearers the dreadful consequences of sinning wilfully after he has received the knowledge of the truth; and thus crucifying the Lord of life and glory afresh, and putting him to an open shame, in the view of unbelievers, when they behold the profane lives of persons professing christianity, and are encouraged to put this scoffing question, "What do ye more than others?" Once more, when they have this animating encouragement, that the grace of God shall be sufficient for them, and that his strength shall be made perfect in their weakness; why chill all the animation of the thought, by sending them on a cold and unprofitable enquiry, whether man can do any thing,

or nothing; or how much, or how little with regard to his salvation; particularly while they are commanded to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, from this sloth-reproving and exciting consideration *, that it is God himself † who is constantly giving the energy to their desires and to the exertion of them, on account of his good pleasure towards them? In a word, I would submit it to your judgments, whether it is not misemploying the Sabbath day, and degrading the dignity of the pulpit, by filling it with speculations on doctrines of doubtful disputation? Perhaps it will be found to be so, from considering the nature of man as he is in himself, and circumstanced as he is in a world full of snares and impediments to holiness: and if it should be found so, the apostle is as just as he is striking in his expression, when he styles such speculations, vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called; not deserving the name of knowledge, because ill-timed and misapplied.

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* Philip. ii. 13. ο θεοσυγεγνώσ, &c.

† ο ενεργων, in the participle.

On this ground, namely the nature and condition of man, *as an inhabitant of this world*, I shall rest my argument to prove, more fully, the superior usefulness of confining ourselves to the preaching of Christ crucified.

Behold man therefore composed of two opposite principles, the flesh and the spirit ; deriving the best part of his constitution from God himself, allied, as to his mental powers, to the world of spirits ; and in his bodily frame, to the dust of this earth, where he is to reside for a while, that his soul may be trained up for the enjoyment of it's God in heaven. In this mixed condition of his nature, behold within him a continual contest between the law of his mind, inducing him to seek after God, and find his happiness in God ; and the law which is in his members, drawing away his heart from God by the deceitfulness of sin, and the influence which material objects, united with the powers of earth-born passions, have over the judgment to prevent it, and over the conscience to slight its admonitions. Behold him therefore roving up and down, day after day, seeking

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ing rest and finding none : his conscience the mean while reproving him, and his passions clamorously demanding fresh gratification. Now, to put the best construction we, or rather he himself, possibly can on his actions, what must be the state of his mind at the close of the week ; whatever may have been his transactions, whether engaged in worldly concerns to a great degree or not, whether in trade or out of it, whether in the gayer scenes of life, or in its more sober amusements ? Something at least has been omitted which ought to have been done for God ; and something done which cannot bear the reflections of his mind, but disturbs its tranquillity. In this situation, the morning of the Sabbath day dawns upon him : he is called to leave the world beneath him, and to go up unto the house of God ; to worship that Being who trieth the reins and the heart ; that holy Being whom he hath offended. Under the gloom which hangs over his mind, how clearing is it to him to consider that it is the day of his Lord—crucified, but risen from the dead ; and therefore that he is

brought nigh unto God by the blood of the cross ; and can bow before his throne in full assurance of faith, that *if we were enemies to God we were reconciled unto him by the death of his Son*; much more being once reconciled, we shall be gradually saved from the power of sin by his life. Are not these the two leading circumstances which give him the true idea of the christian Sabbath ; and teach him in what manner it is to be spent, both at home and in the house of God ; and what he ought to expect from the christian preacher ? If the grand object which should be constantly kept in view in all publick instruction, is to correct the errors of the heart, and to purify the soul, by paying a close attention to human nature, surely the christian preacher must immediately perceive what a tendency to produce these desirable purposes there is in the christian Sabbath, on which the rays of heavenly light and immortality are shining with so strong and pleasing rays ! He must perceive that his business is to urge on his hearers by the constraining love of Christ to live henceforth

forth not unto themselves, indulging the inclinations of animal nature ; but unto him who died for them and rose again. We are to wean them from this world by opening the gates of heaven to their view ; and displaying, as far as mortality can display, the glorious effects of the Saviour's crucifixion, in so perfectly destroying sin, that it shall never enter there, to interrupt the pure offices, the delightful worship, and the ecstatic joys of the spirits of just men made perfect. We are to render their religious services as sweetly pleasing as their earthly pleasures were deceptively insinuating. We are to cultivate in them a devotional temper, and encourage them to hold communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ ; and to have their conversation in heaven from whence they will then look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change their vile bodies, that they may become like to his glorious body. We are hereby to turn their passions and affections into the proper channel ; and to change the nature of them by changing their objects ; their fear, not of man, but of offending God ; their

their hatred, not of their enemies, but of their own pride, perverseness and ingratitude ; their love, not of the world, but of God, and of Christ and divine things. Thus they will not turn away their feet from the Sabbath ; they will call it a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable : they will go from strength to strength, till they appear perfect before God in heaven. For they will be fortified, in the best manner possible, against temptations ; when they return again unto the necessary avocations of life : they will, so long as they continue on the theatre of this world, be instructed how to act their parts aright, as persons only representing characters which they are to take on them for the present : in the leading traits of human life, its social connections—its sorrows—its joys—its possessions—and its honours : so that they who have wives will be as though they had none ; and they who weep as though they wept not ; and they who rejoice as though they rejoiced not ; and they who buy, as though they possessed not ; and they who use the world, as not abusing

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it—because they know that the whole scenery or fashion of it is passing away, and they will be without that real anxiety which those suffer whose characters they represent *.

If the most serious part of our hearers—if aged christians—if those who have seen most of the vanity of human life, and have made the highest attainments in the divine life—if they count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord—if their highest ambition be that they may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings; being made conformable unto his death—doubtless preaching Christ crucified, must be at least equally necessary for those who are restlessly enquiring, who will shew us any good? from whatever cause that restlessness of enquiry may proceed.

Away then with all those speculations which, from the nature of man, from facts and the experience of so many centuries, have been proved to answer scarcely any other purpose than that of promot-
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* 1 Cor. vii. 29—32.

ing differences among christians ; or of perplexing their minds, and causing them to remain in uncertainty concerning the weight of the arguments advanced to prove the truth of the disputable, and therefore unedifying doctrines asserted to be true. From their uncertainty about them, the Sabbath day is spent uncomfortably, hour after hour ; till it is past, and the cares of the world return with their usual, if not greater force than on the preceding week, with little or no preparation made for resisting them.

I would to God that we could all of us be induced to sacrifice our talents, our pride, our love of popularity, or of profit, on the altar of publick utility. The Apostle Paul could do it. The world was crucified unto him and he unto the world : he did not seek to please men, but God. We should not then preach Christ out of envy, or strife, or vain glory. But at the same time that we are grieved at the unhappy conduct of others, we shall be assured, as he was, that our method of preaching Christ will turn to our advantage ; through our people's

people's prayers and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ: and cause us to persevere in the same method, notwithstanding we may find ourselves for a while in the same predicament with the apostle, who perceived that a preference was sometimes given to other preachers above him.

Earnest ourselves in impressing on our hearers, without regard to any system whatever, the real value of the doctrine of a crucified Saviour ; a doctrine which speaks to the heart—and they feeling to a demonstration how rational is our account of christianity ; the natural curiosity of the human mind will prevent them from being indifferent to the various appendages to the grand truth which pertaineth to godliness : and they will endeavour to form conceptions of the particular parts of it in a manner equally rational : their minds will not revolt from the explanation of any particular text given occasionally by such a preacher ; though different from their traditional conceptions ; but it will be received with candour—the truth will in the event be

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promoted in the most effectual, and probably in the most expeditious manner: the unjustifiable insinuation that there is more godliness in one party of christians than another, will cease—the happy times of the gospel will return, when unbelievers shall take up, to full effect, that admirable proverb, once used; and say, ‘ behold christians love one another :’ in due time the various temples of the Lord will be thrown wide open for the entrance of every sincere and devout worshipper alike ; and there will be but one sheepfold under one shepherd,—every one will extend his enquiries and researches after farther knowledge of the Lord with equal amity : and whenever they find their views bounded—not by a cloud of confusion, to dim their sight, but by the clear horizon, through which the eye of mortality cannot penetrate ; they will be contented with their present bright and pleasing prospect ; and will wait with joyful expectation for the happy day, when the mental eye shall be enlarged, they themselves be raised above this hemisphere, and see not as they do now,

now, in a glass darkly; but know even as they are known.

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us all perfect to do his will; working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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